

Contact: Tom Cook 406-444-1645 Release: Receipt

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EXPLORER DAVID THOMPSON

### TO BE HELD AT MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN HELENA

HELENA, MT. -- Following on the heels of Lewis and Clark, explorer David Thompson reached the headwaters of the Columbia River in 1807 and opened the way for commercial fur trading in the Pacific Northwest.

His name lives on in some places in the Northwest, such as Thompson Falls in Montana, yet few know much about the man and his family who later became the chief surveyor for the U.S. – Canadian International Boundary Commission.

The Montana Historical Society hopes to change all that when it hosts “Beyond Borders and Boundaries: David Thompson and the North American Fur Trade Conference” in Helena June 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>.

Society Archivist Rich Aarstad, who is organizing the event in conjunction with the David Thompson Bicentennial group headquartered in Idaho where Thompson spent a great deal of time, said that Thompson is important as an explorer, surveyor, and fur trader.

“He provided the world the first detailed map of the Pacific Northwest, although it was initially held as a trade secret by the North West Trade Company that was headquartered in Montreal,” Aarstad said. “To be honest, he was twice the surveyor that William Clark was.”

Not only was Thompson contemporary to Lewis and Clark, he also represented Canadian and British interests in a land that was still very much up for political grabs.

“It was kind of a footrace to see who would develop the fur trade industry in this part of the world,” Aarstad said. “In a way, the early roots of Montana and the Northwest were more British than American.”

Thompson’s efforts on the upper Columbia coincided with the push up the Missouri River from St. Louis led by Manuel Lisa. That intense activity led to Lisa establishing the first fur trade post in Montana, which was Fort Ramon at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Big Horn Rivers in 1807.

The conference also will deal with the issue of the importance of Native American women to the fur trade industry, Aarstad said. “This is something that we have failed to do in the past,” he said. “Thompson is a good case study because he married a Métis woman who was his partner as well as his wife.”

Keynote speaker for the event is the foremost U.S. authority on Thompson, Jack Nisbet of Spokane, Wash., who is author of the recent book “The Map Maker’s Eye: David Thompson on the Columbian Plateau.” Speakers also will be coming to the event from Canada.

Conference sessions include such topics as women in the fur trade, fur trade posts, trappers and mappers, the ecological impact of trapping, and the natural history of David Thompson’s work.

Major co-sponsors of the event are the Montana Committee for the Humanities, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and various land surveyor organizations across the nation, Aarstad said.

For more information or to register people can go on line to  
[www.montanahistoricalsociety.org/research/library/dtnaftconf2007.asp](http://www.montanahistoricalsociety.org/research/library/dtnaftconf2007.asp), or contact

Aarstad directly at [raarstad@mt.gov](mailto:raarstad@mt.gov) or call him at 406-444-6779.